

Improving Preaching (6) (2.9.1983)

by Nigel Lee

Effective leadership and ministry require self-governance, judging the flesh, and a willingness to be open to God's guidance and correction.

Duration: 37:01

Scripture: Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Preaching"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of sowing good seed in preaching the gospel. He refers to the parable of the sower as a helpful tool for understanding that not every interaction will have the same effect. The speaker emphasizes the need for self-judgment and learning to judge the flesh, using the story of Abraham as an example. He also highlights the principle of sowing before reaping in evangelism, emphasizing the patience and diligence required in spreading the word of God.

Transcript

You, as a believer, have been given the Holy Spirit to help you make this piece of ground fruitful. All is in John 15 about you being fruitful. It's very important.

So you've got the ground, you are to learn how to govern yourself. If you learn how to govern that bit of ground that is you, you then become qualified, shall we say, to have an extended bit of government. Some other bits of ground.

Why? For kids. I mean, your estate is getting bigger. And you've got to plant good seeds in your kids, haven't you? And see them grow up to fruitfulness.

But, says 1 Timothy chapter 3, if you learn how to run your household well, then you qualify for an even larger sphere of responsibility in the Church of the Living God. Leadership in the Church. But, says Paul in 1 Corinthians 6, some of you are going to have to judge angels.

And you're going to learn the necessary skills in judging angels in the Church. In evaluating service in the Church. Where is this all leading, my friends? Well, did you ever read any scriptures about God one day with you raining on earth? Shall we not one day help God to govern the entire earth, do you think? I mean, this is completely fanciful, isn't it? This is just Lee's brain working on, what do you think we're going to do in eternity? We'll all get issued our standard toga, sandals, harp, twangly twangly, hallelujah, hallelujah.

What do you think? I was thinking about this in the middle of last night. When God put Adam on the earth, he didn't give him the whole of the earth to run, did he? He just gave him a little bit of it. The garden.

Now, that wasn't house arrest. He wasn't told to stay there and stay there forever, and that's the only bit you're going to see. That was a training program.

That was an apprenticeship. And he was to have his family and train them up in cooperative gardening with God. But God told him that there were rivers going out and the rivers went to some very interesting places.

Adam had never seen them. But if you follow this river, it'll take you to gold. And if you follow this river, it'll take you to bdellium.

Not quite sure what bdellium is, but it was obviously something that Adam was intended to look forward to owning. But he blew the whole thing before he ever got his sons trained up. God put him in the garden as a training scheme, but told him eventually to subdue the earth.

Not yet. God only gave him a small responsibility to start with, and God will only give you as preachers a little small bit of garden to begin with. It may only be a discussion group at the next conference, but begin well with that.

Getting your body under control, sowing a few good seeds, seeing what comes up. God starts with a small training program, and his intention was temporarily put aside. Has it ever crossed your mind, has it crossed mine in the middle of last night, what we are going to be doing when the future, when this world is made new because it's been spoiled by sin, will this planet prove to have been just like the Garden of Eden, a little small training scheme in a vast solar system, which we will all run for God? Mars and Venus and everything else out beyond, what's it there for, just to lighten up the dark night sky? I don't know.

Fanciful. Wicked notions. Just a mind beginning to probe and question and think.

But it does make life a little bit exciting, doesn't it? The thought of what God is doing now in preparation for the future. How important therefore to learn judgment, right judgment of yourself. And the story of Abraham between chapters 12 and 24, and you remember how God proposes marriage to Abraham in the first few verses of chapter 12.

And then the story of Abraham breaks up into three sections, chapters 12 to 15, 16 to 19, 20 to 24. The very beginning of chapter 12, God is looking for a bride for his son, Jesus. He's proposing marriage to Abraham and all his seed, because he wants a bride for his son.

That process will involve the bride being made fit and ready to satisfy the eternal heart of the Son of God. You and me, we are included in Abraham's seed. In the process we are to become like Abraham.

So the last thing that Abraham is doing, because all the way through Abraham's story, God is speaking at this level, and Abraham is having to work out the implications at the level of his own marriage. Each of these three sections begin with some sin in Abraham's life in relationship to his wife. He prostitutes her in chapter 12.

Blessed to be taken into the court of Pharaoh for money. Becomes a very wealthy man and it reveals the problem of materialism in the heart of Abraham. And God deals with it through chapter 15.

And lo and behold in chapter 16 as we said, impetuously he puts her aside altogether and in the flesh he takes his servant girl, Hagar. Ishmael is born. What is God going to do about the problem of the flesh in his servant? It's a very interesting section this.

You've got all the business of Hagar and Ishmael. That indelible mark in the flesh. What comes in chapter 18 and 19? Dealing with Sodom and Gomorrah, those twin cities that throughout Scripture represent the flesh.

The whole section, you can see the structure of it in a literary way when you read it. At the beginning of it, Abraham is having a child that he's never meant to. At the end of chapter 19, his young relative Lot is having children.

Lot also started out a pilgrim. Finished off a caveman, didn't he? In a drunken orgy in a cave. Here in chapter 16, because of the flesh breaking out, Abraham gives rise to this boy Ishmael.

God is not recorded as speaking to Abraham for another 13 years. And meanwhile Ishmael is growing up and God had said that Ishmael would be a wild ass of a young man. A real donkey.

An absolute oof! Can you imagine him? Letting down the tent at night. Putting cactuses in the sleeping bags. Untying the saddle of his mother's camel as he's riding along.

Endless irritations. I believe that Abraham must have wished very strongly before ever Ishmael came near to the age of 13 that he'd never done it. This wretched boy of his.

He is suffering, learning through the consequences of what he's done. Finally after 13 years God says to him, Abraham, I do want a covenant with you, but you're beginning to understand a little more deeply what's involved. Will you, Abraham, get circumcised as a sign, an indelible sign in the flesh that you put no confidence in the flesh? That's what Paul states is the meaning of circumcision in Philippians 3. We are the true circumcision, he says, round about verse 2, who put no confidence in the flesh.

And Abraham says, Oh God, oh that Ishmael might live before you. Oh that somehow the promises that you've given me might be through Ishmael, through this child of the flesh. Absolutely no, says God.

All right, says Abraham. I'll put aside the flesh, I'll put no hope for the future in the flesh. Ishmael will have to go.

Abraham is learning. He's willing for a deep painful wound in his own flesh because he sees it's what he deserves. The moment he begins to agree with the judgment of God on his own life, what happens? The Lord Jesus turns up outside his tent one day.

Chapter 18. Abraham. Abraham rushes to get him a meal.

They sit down. A young calf dies so that God and man can sit down together in a fellowship meal. We haven't time to talk about that from the book of Leviticus.

God then begins to talk to his servant Abraham about Sodom and Gomorrah. What am I gonna do? Advise me. What shall we do? It must be destroyed.

Abraham talks to God. Supposing there's 50 righteous. 40.

30. 20. Supposing there's 10 righteous.

And Abraham stops at 10. Did you ever wonder why he didn't carry on down? Why? Because this man, because he's willing to judge the flesh in himself and agree that he's gone wrong. And agree that the consequences are his own fault.

And agree that the future does not lie that way. God is already drawing his servant into the throne room of heaven. Incorporating him into the government of what happens in cities on this earth.

Someone else was to come to this earth centuries later and promise his servants that they would govern cities. Jesus does that. Abraham draws a line at 10 because he knows that Lot's there.

Righteous Lot. And his wife and his two daughters. That's four.

If they haven't between them seen six other people influenced then the city is so bad it deserves to go. Let it go. He agrees with God.

And the place is judged and wiped out after righteous Lot is brought out. But Lot, by contrast, now in chapter 19 is not willing to judge the flesh in his own life. You see, Abraham fell.

This is so encouraging. Abraham fell. And yet God taught him.

He learned from the experience. He forgave him. And through the processes of his own fall he was actually trained in government that God was going to share with him.

Lot, on the other hand, when the angels arrive is sitting at the gate of the city. He's come to live in solace. He's risen up in the higher asking.

He's trying his hand at a little bit of politics at the local government. You see there, the gate of the city was the place where the city father sat. It's government.

It's the judge. And you remember what happens, don't you? The two angels come. And Lot says to them, Come into my house.

They take my house and come in. They come in. And before darkness has properly fallen there's a homosexual gang outside the house.

We want those two. Send them out to us. So what is the judge of the city going to do? He offers his own two daughters to this gang so that his own reputation for hospitality isn't dented.

What a bastard. What a man unable to govern in his own house. A man doing, as we sometimes do, as we say, trying to buy off one.

A man is not fit to govern his own home and family, let alone the city, let alone anything else to go. He escaped because he is righteous by faith, but not willing to judge himself and set out as a pilgrim again. He flees to go into Zohar, another little city, let me go into this one.

And then he gets kicked out of that city because they're afraid that earthquakes will come and fire and brimstone. He finishes up, you know, his two daughters are pregnant and the children of Moab and Amnon who were to be thorns and thistles in the flesh or essentially the parallelism built into the structure. All I've done is tell you the story.

That is what that section of Genesis is all about. Learning to judge the flesh and thereby being qualified for what God has for us in the future. I'm sorry I've gone on so long about that.

I got carried away. I've preached a little. But we must beware of being harder on others than we are on ourselves.

Finally, just one or two little scraps. Noel, right at the beginning, he's not here now, but he asked a question on the relationship between expository preaching and worship. I often feel in our worship meetings the lack of having had something from the word of God livingly expounded first.

To warm us up, to fill our hearts, to enrich our souls as I was saying. And I have sometimes suggested in my own church that instead of having the worship service, the breaking of bread and then the preaching, we reverse the order. So that the preaching can prepare people for worship and the breaking of bread.

I think there is a definite connection. Hearts are much more likely to be responding out of fullness rather than duty when the word has touched and helped. Given them light and a sense of God understanding them and having a word for themselves.

The question of a wife. A quotation from William Barclay. As I look back on more than 40 years of married life, I am astonished that the work of the ministry does not destroy ministers' marriages.

The minister will have the best and the biggest room in the house for his study. The minister sees less of his family than any member of his congregation does. He sees less of his children.

He has to leave it to his wife to bring them up. Seldom can he have an evening out with his wife. And when such an evening is arranged, something again and again comes to stop it.

Demands to speak and to lecture. Take him constantly away from home. And when he does come home, he's so tired that he's the worst company in the world and falls asleep in his chair.

As I come near to the end of my days, the one thing that haunts me more than anything else is that I have been so unsatisfactory a husband and a father. As the song of Solomon has it, they made me keeper of the vineyards. But my own vineyard have I not kept.

When the pastoral epistles are laying down qualifications for the elder, the deacon, and the bishop, one of the unvarying demands is that he must know how to manage his own household. And for a minister, that is the hardest thing in the world. He also said in the same book called Testament of Faith which came out in 1975, I am certain that the worst thing a man could have is a doting wife for whom her husband can do no wrong.

A friend, a critic, someone who puts you back together again when other people have broken you up. There was a study made once of a number of men who felt that they had the gift of prophecy. You know, bringing a sharp, cutting, direct, incisive word from God.

And the question was what did their wives feel was their gift? And in nine cases out of ten, the wife of the prophet felt that she had the gift of showing mercy. Showing kindness and mercy. Why is that? Not that she has to pick up the pieces after her husband has been breaking them.

No, so often it's the lot of the prophet to go preach and people turn and cut him to pieces. The prophet is one of the most unwelcome of ministries among us. And the prophet often comes home with knives

sticking out from between his shoulder blades feeling that he's had a rough time.

And the wife is there to show him mercy. To sympathize with him. To put him back together again like Humpty Dumpty and send him out on the next day.

So be very careful whom you marry. I've mentioned this morning John Stock, Dick Lucas but it's also true of Bakht Singh. Although Bakht Singh was married his wife left him when he became a Christian.

He became a Christian I think in about 1946 so he's been a Christian for 37 years. I don't know whether his wife is alive or dead now. I don't know whether he knows that he has lived in singleness ever since.

Being single gives you certain advantages. Time for one thing. You can possibly double the amount of time that you have.

A man can come home from an international trip he's been on his own he gets home he can be at his desk within 10 minutes of arriving if he wants. The house is quiet he can move straight in. Whereas if he's a married man coming home is a most amazing experience.

You get greeted at the airport by kids who have probably been eating sticky sweets while they waited for you to arrive and they plant sticky kisses all over you and if they're small all over your trousers and they want to tell you all their stories and they fight to sit on your knee in the car coming home and then they will bounce on you in bed next morning and you're going to have to listen to all the different tales of what's been happening at school and the troubles and so and so's tooth fell out and you've got to see the tooth and you've got to admire it and put the money under the pillow if that's what they do in your culture. And there's going to be an endless business of how the guinea pigs have had babies and so on. And it's going to take you about two days before the household gets back to normal and you can slip away and get down to any work.

Now actually those are great days and you're all going to get the gift of singleness or the gift of marriage. I mean you can rely on getting one or other of those gifts. And if God gives it to you to be married it's because he knows of the comfort and the fun and the joy and the value in being able to go from a trouble situation into a family that loves you and accepts you.

You know I get a lot of criticism in my work. It's great to come home to kids that well at least at the moment think you're the greatest dad in the world. My daughter arrived at this conference and she wanted her name tagged.

She wanted to wear her name. I said why? Well then people think I'm important she says. A little bit of instruction about you not being important just because your daddy has a loud voice.

So weigh the advantages and the disadvantages. Step into your marriage carefully. Again back to Genesis.

The wife is a help meat. She's to help a husband with a job that he already has. Far too many people rush into marriage before they know what job they're going to do.

How can the wife then know how to help? She doesn't know what kind of a team she's joining. And finally yes a question. I can't just recall the passage that you're referring to.

I know there are some times of doom that are prophesied in Isaiah and it's a mark of the judgment of God on a nation that normal orders have been reversed and so on. A child will reign over you. Seven women will take hold of one man and say be a husband unto us.

They are the ones going around proposing marriage and seven of them are fasting on one chap and it's a mark of a total breakdown in all God's intended order. That's judgment. It may be that kind of a passage.

However I'd like to say that God when he was looking to make woman took a rib. You see to make man God took something nice and soft and malleable like earth. To make woman he took something very hard didn't he? No, no.

Forgive me ladies. You would misunderstand me if you thought that was the interpretation of Genesis 2. The question is not the hardness or otherwise of the rib but he took it from here. Well what are ribs anyway? Supposing you didn't have any ribs.

You'd all sort of blub blub blub blub blub. You'd fold in like jelly wouldn't you? You'd be an extraordinary shape. And you'd actually be very vulnerable.

Someone could give you a friendly punch in the side and you'd be dead on the floor. Your heart has become detached from the tubes. Your ribs protect your heart don't they? They protect your breathing process.

Your ribs protect all the necessities for life. Your ribs. God took a rib made a rib into a wife and has given her back to a man in order to protect his heart to protect his life.

Now there we have something relevant to what you were thinking of. A wife can be a tremendous protector of a man of his time of his emotions. Just to keep the chap going most men are moderately hopeless at cooking.

If left to their own devices they'd starve. They're completely useless at making homes most of them. They'd be content to live sort of in a permanent rugby football changing room with the same sort of smell.

No good for doing any personal evangelism in. Can you imagine inviting the neighbours into a football changing room to... Women are such protectors of men's best interests heart life and so on. In that sense maybe.

Now the final thing I want to say and the time is nearly gone. I have found great help in preaching from the parable of the sower. You don't expect every time you speak to anyone or any group of people to have the same effect.

And you know that people are going to have different effects and God himself says look that's so. Here's this bit of instruction for his disciples before they go out to preach the gospel in all the villages of Judea. And the Lord tells them plainly look you know only one sixth of what you sow is going to bring forth a hundredfold.

Some is going to get snatched away. Some is going to die because the people themselves were shallow and their spiritual experience had little to it. You're going to sow some very good seed and it will start growing but the problem is the barrenness of an overcrowded life.

The Lord is very simple and direct in his diagnosis. Some will only produce thirtyfold some sixty and only one sixth will produce a hundredfold. Accept it.

Your job is to sow good seed. That is your calling for that you've been gifted. And it was good seed that fell everywhere.

But you must remember also one or two things. In evangelism before you can reap there must be sowing. Simple agricultural principle number one.

Even the slowest among us can get hold of that. Before you reap you must sow. It's no good scattering seed one day and then taking the combine harvester out the next day and expecting it all to be ready.

You'll just do damage. And in evangelism some messages you know that you're at the sowing stage. These people aren't going to get converted.

Not yet, maybe one or two that have heard the thing before. It's a sowing time. So don't come home discouraged oh only two people got converted today.

How many had ever heard the thing as clearly as that before? Your job may have been simply to sow. And you know also secondly in any Christian preaching there has to be activity below the surface before there can be activity above. Seeds start working below before above.

So you may be faced with a bunch of people who just sit there and look at you and you think you're not getting through. You don't know what's going on below the surface if it is good seed that you're planting. Good seed has tremendous power.

I've told some of you this before but when they got into the pyramids the archaeologists into the pyramids in Egypt in the middle of some of them they came across little pots of corn. It had been there 3,000 years some of it. Put there you know for the pharaohs to take to the next land to plant with them.

There was little corn been there years. They took it out and they planted some of it in the mud by the side of the river Nile. It grew.

3,000 years locked up in the pyramids but there was still power in the word in the seed. It grew. Sometimes a grain ship has gone down in a storm.

Big ship full of grain and the water has begun to seep into this grain and as the grain has begun to swell up it has split the steel hull of the ship in which it was cased. The power in little seeds. So even if people don't seem to be very responsive at first plant good seed and wait for the activity below the surface.

You've got images of Christian work of sewing of fishing of building and of shepherding. Building, what does Paul say in 1 Corinthians 3 I've laid a foundation. You take care what you build.

Are you a builder? Gold, silver, precious stones that which is going to stand the test of time that which is of faith that which is biblical or is all your work your preaching, your public pulpit platform work going to be burnt up in God's incinerator and it will end up wood, hay and stubble turned to ashes. Take care how you build. Shepherding.

Talked about 1 Corinthians 3 Luke 8 was a sewing passage. Shepherding. 1 Peter 5 Don't lord it over folks.

Don't be a leader just for money's sake. Be an example. Do not lord it over people.

Be ready to learn from others. God will give you an authority sometimes as you speak. But when you come down off the pulpit God has spoken.

Be ready to be humbled to be broken in order that your character might continue to grow. Questions before we finish? What about political preaching is the question? What about political preaching man? Well, can I refer you back to Abraham? There was Lot who joined in with the city council the city fathers sitting in judgment at the gate of the city and there was old Abraham praying with God outside on the hill. Which of them do you think was having the more influence over the course of events? Abraham.

The man of prayer. The word of God will have a political influence. Christians will have a political influence.

The word of God finished off slavery. The word of God changed the character of the Roman Empire. Nation after nation has been affected by the word of God.

It has been the preaching of scripture over the long period of time that has changed the mind and the hearts of men. You can see it in America. You can see it in Britain.

You can see it in many different parts of the world. In Germany as well. How many men who have preached pure politics have had a beneficial effect? Not so many.

For myself I would say it's a waste of time. It's certainly not that to which I am called. I think we're getting close towards the end.

This kind of question is probably very much based on your own culture and background. And may not be of general interest. Frankly I wish that some men whose names appear in the newspapers who are well known political preachers in Northern Ireland I wish they'd concentrate on preaching the gospel.

Which many of them can do so very well. Because their meddling in political affairs has given the gospel a bad name. The man most commonly quoted to me as I was involved in evangelism in Spain and in India was a Northern Irish political preacher.

And I have had tragically many people say I'm not interested in your Christianity. Because look at what's happening in Northern Ireland where the so-called Christians are at each other's throats. A lot of that is the result of political preaching.

But let's leave that. Leave that question. I think I'm going to stop.

Yes. Political affairs come and go. I felt myself that it was sad to see the way in which a wily politician like Richard Nixon used well known Christian leaders as part of his political maneuvering.

And I believe there have been a number of American presidents recently who have done the same. They know that 40% of America claims to have had a born again experience. And it's a pity that the preachers let themselves get trapped in something other than the straight direct preaching of the gospel.

But let's pray. Father we thank you for the power of your word. Thank you that you can take men and women like us, all so different, different backgrounds, different skills, and through the study of your word we can be motivated, made clean, given fresh insight, given that which will feed and strengthen and enrich

others.

Oh God we just now bow and commit ourselves to being available to be used in any way you want. Thank you for the impact of preachers in our lives. Lord raise up a race of men who will fear nothing but you.

Honor your word that again there might be around the world fresh listening. In silence and humility to the word of God in our day. In Jesus name.

Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/29/SID29321.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/nigel-lee/improving-preaching-6-291983/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net